Teaching Translation from Spanish to English
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CHAPTER 11
ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES

THE CYCLE OF INQUIRY—INDUCTIVE AND DEDUCTIVE LEARNING

The aim of this methodology is to teach a skill—translating. As has already been stressed, the translation class is above all a practical class, and yet the students have to understand the principles behind the process that they are taught to follow. They have to understand the "why" in order to be able to answer the "how." Whenever possible, the cycle of inquiry should be simplified. The students should be given teaching units (texts and tasks) that help them to formulate a hypothesis about the principles of translation. At the end of each unit, they should be able to confirm their hypothesis. Just as beginners learning a language find it easier to remember conclusions that they have reached from their own observations, trainee translators find it easier to remember what they find interesting, and a real-life example is often more interesting than a theory. Skills, whether playing the violin, show jumping, or translating, can be developed only by practising, and by practising in the right way.

GROUP DYNAMICS

The teacher's responsibility in the translation class is to maximize opportunities for students to develop their learning potential. Although it is hoped that the teacher is in the enviable position of knowing more than anybody else in the class, there will be areas in which the students' knowledge surpasses the teacher's. If the teacher's A language is English, Spanish students will know more colloquial Spanish than he or she does, even if he or she is a more skilled reader. If the teacher has spent a long time out of the UK, British students will know more about the UK today: what it is like to live in Wolverhampton in a recession, the latest slang and "buzz" words, and so on. Exchange students from other countries can contribute insights from their own languages and cultures. It is essential to pool all of the resources in the class and not to be restricted to a single channel of communication (teacher ↔ students), but to open up communication channels among the students.

Like the language teacher, the translation teacher has to devote some thought to achieving a communicative situation in the classroom. It is particularly important
to integrate the foreign students from the beginning. A couple of class hours spent on getting to know each other will pay dividends throughout the year. It is also important to obtain a classroom that lends itself to group work: large enough for the students to move around in, and with chairs that are not secured to the floor. The more comfortable the students are with each other, the teacher, and the classroom, the easier it is to achieve active participation of all members of the class.

Some group work, both in the classroom and as homework, yields good results. As in the language class, it has been found that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. There are advantages in asking the students to do some of their translation homework in groups of two to four people. The text is worked on very thoroughly because it goes through four stages:

1. In-class discussion of the general sociohistorical context of the SLT or a discourse-analysis questionnaire.
2. Individual first-draft translation of the text at home.
4. Corrected translations returned in class and discussion of the problems and different solutions.

The students gain confidence working in this way. In groups, they often find solutions to problems themselves, which is a much more efficient learning process than obtaining a solution from the teacher. The final in-class discussion is often very lively because they have already invested so much time and effort in the translation that they are really interested in the outcome, and also because as a group they do not feel as threatened (Weymouth, 1984: 167). The success of this system depends largely on good organization on the part of the teacher. Texts must be given well in advance, deadlines must be respected, and all groups must hand in all translations.

We saw from the Ottawa questionnaire that students appreciate variety in the classroom. A variety of activities and tasks is invaluable for maintaining motivation and high levels of participation and for potentiating learning.

**DELIMITING DIFFICULTIES**

To a great extent, students’ expectations coincide with my opinion about how to program a translation course. The course should have a structure with clearly established objectives. Translation difficulties should be delimited and presented in a rational order (within a theoretical, methodological, and contextual framework). Motivation should be maintained by providing a variety of activities and fields of discourse. However, for prose translation a greater emphasis should be placed on specialized translations, which, with the aid of parallel texts, are easier than general
translations. This preference is confirmed by the demands of the market and the students' own abilities. Nevertheless, general texts can also be used to provide variety, interest, and encyclopedic knowledge, illustrate specific translation principles, and provide experience in SLT analysis.

Most of the units in part 4 are intended for the first year of prose translation. Each task sheet is designed to concentrate on a specific, delimited difficulty so that the students can induce the "why" behind the "how"—the principle behind the practice. The following basic translation principles (drawn from theoretical and methodological considerations) are used to establish progression and delimit difficulties in the teaching of prose translation from Spanish to English.

**Some Basic Translation Principles**

1. The translation process is made up of three stages: comprehension, deverb-alization, and reformulation.

2. Different languages organize meaning and lexis in different ways. Semantic fields are rarely exactly equivalent—for example, *correr* and *run*.

3. Lexical polysemy is solved by context—for example, *double the money, double the blanket, he has a double, the families doubled up, he was doubled up in pain, daily double, he hit a double, he rented a double room, they have a double bed*.

4. Syntactic polysemy is solved by context—for example, *his car, his house, his arm, his father, his partner, his country, his work, his boss, his punishment, his God, his heir, his wife, his memory, his growth, his death, his attacker, his folly, his party, his hearing*.

5. Collocation is not rule-based.

6. Standardized language must be distinguished from nonstandardized language.

7. Context affects register (field, mode, and tenor).

8. Multiple contexts are involved in translation: the contexts of the SLT author, the SLT reader, the translation initiator, the *skopos*, the translator, the TLT reader.

9. Negotiating meaning requires awareness of pragmatic purpose and inter-textuality.

10. Discourse cohesion and coherence are expressed differently by different languages.
ESTABLISHING PROGRESSION

The teaching units in part 4 are aimed at a first level of prose translation, and each one has one or more of the above principles as learning objectives. The units are grouped into five chapters: “Words in Context” (chapter 12); “Sentences in Context” (chapter 13); “Deverbalization” (chapter 14); “Restricted Codes and Transcoding” (chapter 15); and “Cohesion and Coherence” (chapter 16). The chapters have been ordered in this way to attempt a rational presentation of translation difficulties. Chapters 14 and 15 fulfil a double function of illustrating translation principles and preparing students for professional translating. They include the kind of translating that is most commonly asked of prose translators which is the kind they are most able to do.

Hurtado Albir (1994a) is generous in allowing inversa a pedagogical role as a good contrastive exercise and in improving the foreign language, but she advises teachers (a) only to introduce it after the students have got used to directa, (b) to adjust the tasks to the students’ level, and (c) to prepare the reformulation stage with great care.

The aim here is more ambitious, as students may have to translate into English at some point in their working lives. Whether they go any farther than the simplest service translations will depend on their own circumstances, abilities, and inclinations. The work they do in inversa should be reflected in their directa and should make them better translators into their own language. Nevertheless, Hurtado Albir’s advice is sound. The principal difference between the inversa class and the directa class will be the greater attention paid to reformulation at all levels: lexical (the dire problem of collocation), syntactic, and textual.

One way of preparing the reformulation stage with care is to begin with texts written in restricted codes, in which there is a high degree of standardized language with accepted equivalents in the TL. Working with parallel SL/TL texts in restricted codes provides the students with reliable, useful guidelines for their translation. Examples of standardized language include commonly used metaphors, idioms, proverbs, public notices, expletives, usual ways of stating the date and the time of day, dimensions, performative expressed in accepted formulae, the language of weather reports, recipes, games, company reports and accounts, the formats of agendas and minutes, business letters, and medical reports (Halliday, 1973).

Some of the texts using standardized language could also be considered specialized language or language for special purposes and, in most directa courses, would be introduced only later on as practice in specialized translation. However, simple examples of this type of SLT, accompanied by a parallel text or texts in the TL, are introduced quite early on in the inversa program.

Another advantage of using standardized texts is that it is precisely these text types (service translations) that make up the bulk of the prose translator’s work. Therefore, motivation is reinforced on two scores: the task is within their scope and
they can see a practical professional application in the future. On the other hand, the *inversa* class should not be limited to this kind of text, because the content is not, on the whole, very interesting. Motivation can be stimulated toward the end of the year, when students are more confident about their ability to translate into English, by choosing texts that are intrinsically interesting and for which an investigation of their pragmatic purpose and semiotic value can lead to valuable discussions in class.
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